

[John H. Fuller]

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Folk stuff - Rangelore

Gauthier, Sheldon F.

Rangelore

Tarrant County, Dist. 7 [32?]

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John H. Fuller, 62, 309 W. Weatherford St., Ft. Worth, born April 22, 1876 at Elk County, Kan. When his father became foreman on the Crook, Shank and Jones ranch the family moved to Oklahoma. At 14 Fuller started his cowhand career which he has since followed and is now (1937) working on the Winfield Scott ranch in Tarrant County.

"From the time I was eight years old I have never been without the hossy stink about me. I was born in Elk County, Kan., April 22, 1875. My father had settled on a piece of land there calculating to do some farming. He had put in a number of years as a cowhand in the Southwest before he got the idea of going in double harness and settled down in Kansas. He stayed with the farm for eight years, living in a dugout where I was born. The hankering for the hoss stink never left him and in [1893?] it got the best of him.

"He was offered a chance to join the 'CSJ' outfit and be the cook-a-dodle-do. The outfit was located in the Indian Territory, now the State of Oklahoma, in that section around Ardmore. There were around 35 hands working with the outfit and run about 15,000 head of critters. It was an open range so I was in the deal at the age of eight looking on and

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getting my eye full when the business still called for men with guts and a good hoss as the saying goes. [???

“I just naturally soaked up the cow work pestering around the Waddies. I took every chance that came my way to be around the bunch. I eyeballed their [?] with the rope, wrangling hosses and other work. Naturally I tried my hand at everything and when I reached the age of 14 was a fair-to-middling cowhand. 2 “I was not hired but shoved into a job by my dad one morning. He was calling off riders after a stomp to hunt strays. He needed all the hands he could get so yelled at me: “Here you greener you have to make yourself useful for a day or two. Straddle a hoss and jiggle along with Blacky Burk.” From that day on to this the hossy stink has been with me. Starting that morning I became a regular hand on the 'CSJ' and remained there for several years.

“I did not reckon about pay when I started out that morning with Blacky Burk but when pay day showed up Dad put four \$5. gold pieces in my hand. I swelled up like a carbuncle. Blacky had reported that I was a top hand and Dad said being that he needed a hand I had the job. I took my turn a-side of the other waddies and in a years time I was drawing down six \$5. gold pieces.

“To tell you what was the toughest work I reckon I'll have to give that to night riding. Dealing with a stomp at night is no custard pie either. When the cattle stampede during a storm at night or any other time a fellow is too busy to get tuckered and time flies but night riding during a cold rain or snow as we had in the Territory is wearing. Under that condition an hour takes a week to pass. A felloW just rides back and forth killing time waiting the end of his shift.

“Some waddies reckon to stomp as the worst deal to handle. It took action and I just plumb enjoyed the excitement. In my days on the range we did not have the Indians trouble and the only stampedes we bad came from scares. What caused the scares at times would cause a follow to work his conk over time to reckon. I often tried to calculate many causes

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of stomps. It seemed that at times the critters would get into a state where they are 3 waiting for an excuse to go on the run, then the striking of a match at night would furnish the excuse. A storm with sky fire and thunder was always a good excuse for the critters to run. Let a wolf run into a herd, or a small thing like a skunk can cause the critters to go away.

“In the Territory storms were the worst fears we had. There were plenty in that country and the worst stampedes we had took place in those winds. The storm began with a wind and that busted things up tolerable well. Then sky fire and thunder followed plenty. It was still as an arroyo in a dry spell before the wind hit. It came on all of a sudden. We were not calculating on a spell of weather because the stars were bright. Suddenly a dark cloud showed up laying low to the North and it was moving fast and the first thing we knew it was hitting right pert.

“The critters began to get to their feet and stir during the quiet spell and when the wind hit throwing sticks, stones and other material those critters turned loose pronto. All the waddies were out because it was reckoned that their presence would be wanted as soon as the wind hit. The hands were circling the herd but when the storm hit we had as much chance to hold that herd as a fellow has to hold a drunken cowhand at a prayer meeting. The wind lasted a short spell—say five minutes—but when it stopped and set to pouring water the herd was a-going like something that broke out of the back door of hell. The sky fire was shooting so fast that we could see the critters tolerably well. Those critters look like a dark wave just going up and down with fire hopping and skipping over their horns. Then a-top of that thunder was rolling and a-crashing which gave a fellow plenty of op'ra. 4
“That night I was straddle one of the best hosses I ever was or expect to be on. His name was Pronto, called that because the name was fitting to him. That hoss could run all day and cover ground fast as I am here to tell. He not only could run fast all day but knew all about every angle of the cow work. So all that I could do was to sit in the tree and watch the scenery.

"When the herd broke Pronto broke with them and took for the lead. He got to the head and stayed there running aside of the lead critters crowding against them trying to force those crazy animals to swing. He not only crowded but he would reach over and bite their necks. He was the only hoss I ever heard of that would pull that trick. The hoss got results on a few but he failed to put enough of the critters in a turn because that night the animals were too loco and running to fast. We would find ourselves with a few [crowded?] to the side and those in the rear going around us. To keep from getting in the midst of the critters we would have to drag out front again. While Pronto was a sure footed critter I did not hanker to go down in the midst of the running animals with several thousand coming on behind. If I did the eternal range would have been next stop for sure.

"It was still dark so the waddies spent the time until light after the critters stopped about 15 miles from where they started with cattle scattered in all directions. singing to their lady love. There were many songs and each man had his favorite. I'll give you the words to the one I tried to sing to quiet the critters: "Sing'er out my bold coyotes Leather fists and leather throats Tell the stars the way we rubbed the haughty dawn We'er the fiercest wolves a-prowling and its just our night for howling. [Ee-yow?] a riding up the rocky trail from town.

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"When daylight showed we took stock and calculated about 200 head strayed and there were two waddles missing. Five of us never stopped for chuck and our tape worm was howling plenty but we took what was called a Spanish supper, just tightened our belts and set out to find Red and Slim. Slim was found about six miles away from where the stomp started. We sighted his hoss grazing and there we found Slim stomped to death. No doubt his hoss hit a hole and Slim took a spill among the running critters. Red was found a short piece yonder from Slim with a cracked leg bone that he got from a spill.

"I stayed with the 'CSJ' outfit for 25 years. It had been owned by Crook, Shank and Jones but was changing hands which changed up the works a little so I dragged over to the

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Gloves-Wells outfit. The brand of the Gloves-Wells outfit was 'GW' and located in the Durant section of the Territory.

“The 'GW' outfit was shaped up about like the 'CSJ' but a trifle larger and used about 40 hands. I stayed there for several years. They began to break up the open range with fences and when they did that I dragged to the skillet section of Texas and finally they began to tie that section up with fenced ranges, then I dragged over to the 'T bar' outfit near Tahoka, Texas which is owned by the Edwards family. After five years there I came to the Edwards ranch west of Ft. Worth. From the Edwards' outfit I went to the Winfield Scott outfit north of Ft. Worth. That is where I hang out now.

“I have dragged from the open range to the fence outfit of around 2,000 head which is [thenumber?] Scott and Edwards have on their ranches. I have seen the work on the open range where the boys took their chuck behind a chuck wagon and slept out in the open to where 6 we sleep in soft beds and take our chuck stated at a table with all the fixings. The work is play compared with what it was when I started. But I'll take the former days for mine if I h[a] the chance. I enjoyed eating the sop, lick, slowelk, whistleberries and sourdough bread squatted on my hunch behind the chuck wagon. The chuck the old belly-cheater on the 'CSJ' “Dog-Face”—we called him—put before us waddies caused us to hanker for the feedbag. It did not have the fancy fixings we are served now but what we did get sure kept us fit with plenty of leaf lard on our slats. A good fat yearling beef with some other brand broiled over a campfire was fitting to eat.

“Outside of the rustlers and stampedes the lining in our clouds was mostly silver. Indian trouble was over with during my day. We had the rustler and still have the past to deal with. The only change as far as the rustlers are concerned is that they have changed from a hoss to an auto-truck. The rustler today cuts the line fence drives in and loads a few critters that he hauls to town. In most cases the critters are killed before the ramrod knows he has lost any cattle. As a rule the act is not known until the line rider finds the fence cut

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and tracks that show what has happened. The rustlers can only be trailed to the main drag and there the trail stops.

“The cowmen have had laws passed for their protection in the matter of sale of branded cattle and have inspectors at markets but these folks who buy the rustled critters because they can get them for a smaller price. If the critters are killed and skinned you can't tell where the beef comes from. It is necessary to keep an eye peeled for the rustler as close as it was in the old days.

“In the days of the hoss when rustlers drove the critters off they would watch for strays as well as watch for a chance to cut 7 out a bunch from the herd. A 100 head cut out of several thousand critters can't be spotted. It was necessary to catch the rustler at the job or in possession of the cattle by spotting the trail and follow it. If the rustler had a registered brand and cattle carrying it then all he had to do was to chin that the critters strayed to his bunch. If we spotted the trail and followed the critters then there was not much far them to chin about.

“My father was a regular hound dog following a trail. Chas, Goodnight of the old 'JA' was noted as the greatest trailer in the business but I think Father was about as good. He could calculate on the time the rustling took place within a few hours. He would look at the hoof prints and say, “Well, she is about five hours old” or, whatever the time was. That prattle may sound tall but it was done by eyeing insects and their marks in the print. A trail an hour or so old has no insects in to speak of but as time goes by insects will gather and their action leaves marks. The marks increases with time and to a fellow that knows about such signs the extent of the marks will indicate the time they have been there.

“We had several little mixups with the rustlers. There was one which gave us a pert little fight. I sighted the trail showing that about 50 head of critters were drove off. Father said that the trail was less than five [hours?] old and ordered 10 of us to follow it. It was just at

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dawn when I spied the tracks. We trailed all day and about an hour before sundown Father said, "Boys we are going to get them brand blotters the first thing in the morning."

"We were on the trail the next morning as soon as we could see the marks. We jiggled along about two hours when Father sighted the rustlers with his spy glass off about three miles. He ordered us to split into two bunches of five each and to flank the boys on each side and to use our artillery plenty when we get in firing range. We followed orders and when we made run for them they gave their bosses the gut hooks and headed for a break about a mile beyond. We failed to get in good shooting range but before the rustlers could hit the breaks we had civilized two of them. The others made the break and of course it was useless to go in after them. We did not want to be branded from [ambush?].

"Them fellows threw lead at us while heading for the break but never made a hit. There was one waddie in our bunch that sure could put the lead where he wanted it to land. His name was Kid Murphy and using a six-gun he could out shoot any living man I ever watched fan a gun. The Kid spent his spare time shooting at marks and rabbits that showed within his gun range. Shooting contests were often held between us waddies. Murphy could spot us and still beat us. One of the things that he did was [?] shoot at a mark riding on a hoss going at top speed and at that he could beat us letting us shoot from a standing position. During our spells of play we had all kinds of contests such as roping, riding and bull-dogging. When talking about roping I doff my sombrero to Booger Red. I never worked with him but have watched him smear the loop and that waddy could put the rope any place he wanted to.

"What spare time the waddies had was spent in some kind of contest or practice. If they were not doing that it was telling [lies?]. We would sit around the camp at night, especially during round-up time when strangers were present from other outfits, and then the lifes would be told. It has been such a long spell since I heard those lies that I can't remember much of them. There is one that I can't forget that Kid Murphy would tell when a spree

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of lying was on with some stranger on hand to listen. I'll try and repeat the story as the Kid told it:

"You boys have heard tell how wild it use be [West?] of the Pecos. I was down there when just a kid graduating into the rawhide class. I was [?] in the Pecos section where the tamest was wilder and tougher than a she [catamount?] with a batch of kittens. If a fellow wanted to live he just had to be faster on the draw than the other fellow. When a buckaroo got plugged all that was said would be 'Well he had no business being slow on the draw'. The facts are that a fellow was not respected unless he had a notch on his gun, the more he had the better it was for him and to be without a notch was just too bad.

"I ambled into a pizen joint soon after hitting one town and there were about 20 buckaroos in the place. I sauntered up to the bar and [?] down a ten gold piece and [?], 'Boys belly up and name your pizen.' The pizen [?] was passing out the bottle when in dragged a buckaroo about six six from the floor and measured four feet across the shoulders. He was [?] headed and wore a long mustache dropped over his mouth. His eyes set far apart and deep in his head. There were two six-guns hanging at this side, a stiletto sticking in his belt. He was quite sociable looking.

"Well he [mosied?] up to the bar and said, "Gents I'm a stranger in these parts and folks call me [Sunny?] Jack. Am I invited to partake of some pizen." I sez to him, "Welcome stranger, I have ordered up the pizen; name your likes."

"He gulped down a shot of the fluid and then asked what excitement was on. The pizen shooter answered him and sez, "Stranger 10 things have been mighty quiet here about for several days."

"Sunny Jack run his eyes over the crowd and sez, "I'm hankering for some excitement." Then he pulled a gun out of a rawhide's holster that was standing next to him. After looking it over he returned it the fellow saying, "A disrespectfully disrespectful person, not a notch on his gun. You buy a round of pizen." The rawhide backed away and made for a draw.

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Well sir, that Sunny Jack moved his hand so fast that I could not follow the move. He drew his gun and shot/ the gun out of that rawhide's before we can count three. Then the buckaroo grabbed that fellow by the hair of the head and circled his neck with the stiletto cutting the flesh to the neck bone. Then he disjoined the neck like you would a chicken. The body slouched to the floor and there the stranger stood holding the head by the hair. He ambled over to the bar and set the head on it. He looked at the head for a second smiling at the face then spit a gob of 'backy juice in the eye and sez, "Name your pizen fellows this lad has paid."

"Well sir, there I was without a notch on my gun and knew that I would be the next he would call on for some excitement. It was chuck time and the damn belly-cheater hit me with a boot and hollered, "Time to put on the feedbag." I was plumb riled about being woke at that stage because I was wanting to try my hand with Sunny Jack."